Fill Up Your Days
(An Address To Paulinus)

Do you not think it curious indeed,
Paulinus, men should treasure above all
The worthless acquisitions of this life,
That they should haggle tirelessly their rights
To this or other property or debt?
That kings should muster armies and make war
Against their neighbours in defence of land,
And often land of little consequence,
So narrow it could not sustain ten men
Were it good soil rather than sand and rock?
And that in the most trivial matters
Two men may come to blows over mere coins
Or baubles no slave would be proud to own?
And that these very men who would defend
Such trinkets to the death would waste their lives
In pursuits which deliver no reward?
Where can the man be found who distributes
His money freely to acquaintances?
Yet he who would in horror shrink from this
Would squander hours making baby talk
To his mistress, or wrangling with his wife,
Would waste precious minutes to scold his slave,
Or sacrifice a whole day rushing round
The city on some useless social deed.
Add up the time he wastes; an hour here,
Another there, an evening and a day,
A week or even more spent making talk,
Or engaging himself in thoughtless vice.
Consider too the effects of such vice:
In the end what good comes of eating meat,
Or gorging food and drinking to excess?
What profit it a man to win at dice,
And in a week to lose it all again?

To fast oneself may be good for the soul,
But to over-eat does not improve it,
Nor does it feed the mind, and last of all
Does one's body gain benefit from greed -
It is the task of a pig to grow fat,
Excess of drink abuses the body,
And even worse than this, may harm the mind,
for when the flesh is cut, though it may heal,
A scar always remains, however faint.
Scars inflicted on the mind can't be seen,
But, like the wind, are no less real for that.
And gambling: few men win their fortunes here,
Though many lost their best years and their wealth:
Providence is no friend of recklessness.
I say to you Paulinus, and all men,
Be thrifty with your time as with your wealth,
Cling tightly to your days as does your list
Cling tightly to your purse - which would you choose
If you were forced to exchange: gold or years!
And let not those who readily complain
That life is short, chastise Nature for this.
No man who wastes an hour of this time
Has any cause to vent his spleen on God.

Fill up your days! I say unto all men,
And brood not on how short you think your span.